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ABSTRACT

An examination of the National Teacher Examinations (NTE) database was conducted at Ball State University in Muncie (Indiana) to identify students and alumni who had to retake at least one part of the NTE Core Battery. The study, which was limited to subjects who eventually passed all three parts of the NTE Core Battery, focused on test-related actions taken by subjects between their initial failure and subsequent success. The NTE Core Battery Questionnaire was mailed to 87 subjects. Thirty-four (42%) of the subjects returned the questionnaire. Results indicate that: (1) the communication skills test was the portion most often failed; (2) as frequency of retake increased, the more likely it was that the subject would rely upon special preparation; (3) subjects typically reported use of a commercial study guide; and (4) other activities that proved to be helpful to examinees included taking fewer tests at one time, resting prior to taking the test, discussing the test with other examinees, reviewing course materials, tutoring, attending workshops, and taking a regular college course. Seven tables are included. The preliminary and final survey questionnaires are provided. (TJH)

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RETAKING THE NTE CORE BATTERY

WHAT HELPS?

April 1990

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Director of Certification
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Introduction

Since July 1, 1985 all applicants for the initial Indiana instructional license have had to pass the Core Battery section of the National Teacher Exam (NTE) unless they possessed a valid out-of-state license and had at least three years teaching experience. The NTE Core Battery consists of three subtests: Communication Skills (CS), General Knowledge (GK), and Professional Knowledge (PK). Passing scores have been set for each of the subtests separately, therefore, only the subtests which are not passed must be retaken. No limitations have been imposed which restrict the number of times an individual may take the tests.

Not passing just one of the tests poses a potential problem of major significance since all must be passed in order for the individual to practice the profession for which he or she has invested four or more years of resources. As a result, test retaking is a common practice with eventual success in a significant number of cases.

The use of standardized tests as part of an admissions process, e.g., the LSAT, MCAT, SAT, or for professional licensing, e.g., the nursing boards, the C.P.A. exam, and NTE has a long history, including the development of materials and activities aimed specifically at preparing individuals to pass such examinations. Such activities range from brief leaflets to books to multi-day commercial workshops. A question arises as to the effectiveness of the various preparation activities, particularly for those individuals who must retake such tests.

The specific question within the context of teacher certification in Indiana is as follows. For those individuals who take the NTE Core Battery, and who fail at least one of the three subtests at least once, but who eventually do pass the entire battery, did they do anything between initial test failure and eventual test passing which they felt helped them to pass?

Procedure

An examination was made of the NTE data base at Ball State University, a mid-size state university with a long and distinguished history as a teacher preparation institution, in an attempt to identify students and alumni who had to retake at least one part of the NTE Core Battery, but who eventually passed all three parts.

The number of individuals available for the study was limited for a number of reasons. First of all, approximately eighty percent of those taking the NTE Core Battery do not have to retake any of the subtests since they pass it on the first attempt, as reported by unpublished Indiana Department of Education documents. Secondly, since in the context of teacher

certification, success is defined as having passed all three parts because that is what is required for certification, individuals who retook and eventually passed one or two parts, but still had not passed all three were not included in the study. A third factor which limited the pool of subjects is the fact that at the time of the study the NTE requirement had been in place for only two years, plus many of those who failed tests during the second year had not yet had time to pass them. Another factor lies in the fact that examinees determine who receive copies of their scores, and until recently there was no reason why students had to arrange to have their scores sent to the university. A final reason behind a limited pool of subjects for this study involves obtaining accurate mailing addresses. For the most part, the examinees involved took the tests as seniors. Therefore, any retake scores were received close to or even after graduation. As a result, most questionnaires were mailed to subjects after graduation to addresses which in many cases were no longer valid.

In cases involving incomplete data about the eventual passing of all three tests, an initial questionnaire (Appendix A) was sent. It went only to those who had experienced at least one test failure, and it was designed to clarify which tests they had taken and which they had passed regardless of the number of attempts. Those subjects who indicated that they had not yet passed all three subtests were not included in the study.

A questionnaire, with cover letter (Appendix B), was sent to all individuals who had been identified as having passed the entire NTE Core Battery, but who had failed at least one of the subtests prior to eventual passing. Eighty-seven questionnaries were sent out, six were returned by the post office as undeliverable, and thirty-four completed responses were received.

Table 1
Questionnaires Sent

Questionnaires Mailed	87
Returned by Post Office	6
Net Amount	81
Questionnaires Returned	34
Response Rate	42%

Results

The Communication Skills test was failed more often than the other two parts of the Core Battery as evidenced by the data in Table 2. This is not suprising in light of state-wide passing rates as published in internal documents by the Indiana Department of Education. Such reports associate the lowest passing rates with CS, followed by GK, and then PK(highest passing rate).

Table 2
Number Of Times NTE Core Battery Subtests Were Taken
By Those In The Study

	Numbers and (%) Of Individuals				
	Number of Times Tests Taken				
Test	1*	2	3	4	=>5
CS	9(26%)	17(50%)	8(24%)		
GK	21(62%)	9(26%)	4(12%)		
PK	24(71%)	7(21%)	2(6%)	1(3%)	

* Taking a test only once means that it was passed in this context. However, such individuals did fail at least one other test.

The 34 subjects in the study took a total of 166 tests including all retakes, with 112 (or 67%) being retakes as seen in Table 3. Since the focus of the study was on what was done to pass tests which were already failed once, the responses were based upon retake experiences only. Therefore, it can be said that 52% of the findings are based upon experiences related to retaking the CS part since 52% of the retakes involved that subtest, (see Table 3). In the same manner 27% of the findings are based upon GK experiences and 21% are based upon PK experiences.

Table 3
Numbers Of Test Takings and Retakings

Total No. of Test Takings		166	
No. of Retakes:	CS	58	(52%)
	GK	30	(27%)
	PK	24	(21%)
Total No. of Retakes		112	

One of the procedures used by individuals who do not pass such tests is to simply retake them without any special preparation. In this study, less than half (44%) of the respondents followed that procedure with the CS part, as seen in Table 4, and an even smaller proportion (38%) did so in connection with the GK subtest. However, 60% of those having to retake the PK section did simply retake the test without any special preparation.

Table 4
Retaking Procedure

	Of Those Who Retook Tests, These...	
Test	Simply Retook	Did Something To Improve Their Score Before Retaking
CS	11 (44%)	14 (56%)
GK	5 (38%)	8 (62%)
PK	6 (60%)	4 (40%)

When the data on retaking procedure is analyzed further by the number of retakes (Table 5), two things become evident. First, the more often a test must be retaken the the greater is the reliance upon the procedure of doing something other than just retaking, at least in connection with the CS and GK parts. Secondly, the data of Table 4 with regard to the PK subtest is reversed. That is, more than half (57%) of those who retook the PK test only once did do something other than just doing it over. Also indicated is the fact that those who failed the PK test more than once, but who eventually passed it, simply kept retaking it until they passed.

Table 5
Retaking Procedure By Number Of Times Taken

	Of Those Who Took Tests...					
	Two Times These-		Three Times These-		Four Times These-	
Test	Simply Retook	Did Something	Simply Retook	Did Something	Simply Retook	Did Something
CS	8 (47%)	9 (53%)	3 (38%)	5 (63%)		
GK	3 (33%)	6 (67%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)		
PK	3 (43%)	4 (57%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)		

When a test had to be retaken, and something was specifically done by the examinees to improve their scores other than simply retaking the test, the activities felt to be helpful are made clear in Table 6. The single most important activity, as reported by the subjects in this study, was the use of a commercial study guide. That activity was also selected most often as "one of the five most important." When it comes to being "helpful," that activity was tied with "rest" and just slightly ahead of "discussing with others." "Taking fewer tests" also seemed to be significant.

Table 6
Activities Felt Helpful In Improving Test Score
When Retaking A Test

	No. Of Times Activity Selected As...		
Activity	Helpful	One Of Five Most Important	Single Most Important
1. Took fewer tests at one time.	16	10	4
2. Got plenty of rest.	21	10	1
3. Discussed test with others who took test.	19	11	1
4. Used commercial study guide.	21	19	12
5. Reviewed course materials.	11	9	3
6. Obtained tutoring.	1	1	1
7. Attended a free workshop.	4	3	1
8. Attended a commercial workshop.	0	0	0
9. Took a regular college course.	1	1	0
10. Other	7	5	5

The questionnaire provided respondents with an opportunity to identify score-improving activities other than those listed. As can be seen in Table 7, the most common "other" actually was not something which the examinees did to improve their scores, but a perceived change in testing conditions. The "other" data provided by the respondents is interesting, but not conclusive.

Table 7
Summary of "Other"

Could hear recordings better because of smaller groups, and better recordings or listening conditions.
Note: This is not something which the examinee did, but it was listed by some of the subjects. (Listed thrice.)

Answered the way I thought they wanted it answered, rather than how I thought it should be answered. (Listed once.)

Taught grammar during student teaching. (Listed once.)

Prayed. (Listed once.)

Took a large dose of Pepto-Bismol to be able to sit through the test. (Listed once.)

Conclusion

Individuals who qualified for a teaching license by passing the NTE Core Battery and who had to retake at least one subtest in the process, typically reported that they improved their scores enough to pass by using a commercial study guide. From this study it appears that the best procedure to follow when one of the NTE Core Battery subtests is not passed is to use one of the commercial study guides prior to retaking the test. From this study alone it cannot be said that use of commercial study guides prior to taking the Core Battery the first time would improve the chances of passing, but it could be a possibility.

APPENDIX A

Preliminary Questionnaire

October 20, 1987

Dear Student or Former Student at Ball State:

We are in the process of studying various issues related to the requirement of passing the National Teacher Exam (NTE) for any one wishing to obtain an Indiana teaching license. One specific aspect deals with those individuals who failed to pass one of the NTE tests the first time they took it.

You have been sent this letter because we would like to ask your assistance in making our records more complete. Please answer the questions below and return this letter, as soon as possible, in the envelope provided. Thank you in advance for your help.

Please supply the following information:

NAME: _____
(Last) (First) (Initial) (Maiden)

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

_____

_____

Place a check (X) after the name of each NTE Core Battery Test which you have already taken.

Communication Skills (CS) _____
General Knowledge (GK) _____
Professional Knowledge (PK) _____

Place a check (X) after the name of each NTE Core Battery Test which you have passed, regardless of how many times taken.

Communication Skills (CS) _____
General Knowledge (GK) _____
Professional Knowledge (PK) _____

Your prompt response is deeply appreciated.

Sincerely,

Bruce K. Alcorn, Ph.D.
Director, Undergraduate
Teacher Certification

APPENDIX B

Final Questionnaire

Dear Test Taker:

Each year, hundreds of candidates for the Indiana teaching license retake one or more of the NTE tests because of scores which do not meet the state minimums.

According to our records you have taken and passed all three parts or subtests of the NTE Core Battery although you had to retake at least one of them.

In an attempt to help those individuals who have yet to pass the entire NTE Core Battery, we are trying to identify what was done by individuals such as yourself to ultimately pass. Your prompt response to the enclosed short questionnaire will assist us in helping others. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Bruce K. Alcorn, Ph.D.
Director, Undergraduate Teacher
Certification

P.S. When answering the questionnaire please keep the following points in mind:

--We are only dealing with the NTE Core Battery.
--The NTE Core Battery has three parts or subtests:
-Communication Skills (CS)
-General Knowledge (GK)
-Professional Knowledge (PK)
--You have now passed all Core Battery subtests according to our records.
--You failed to pass at least one Core Battery subtest the first time you took it.

NTE CORE BATTERY QUESTIONNAIRE

DIRECTIONS:

Questions #1-6 are of the multiple-choice type. Indicate your response to each by circling the letter in front of the appropriate statement.

When answering questions about how many times tests were taken, disregard (do not count) any testing sessions which you re-did due to a problem with the test administration that was not your fault, such as a bad recording.

1. How many times have you taken the Communication Skills (CS) subtest altogether?

   A. 1
   B. 2
   C. 3
   D. 4
   E. 5 or more

2. How many times have you taken the General Knowledge (GK) subtest altogether?

   A. 1
   B. 2
   C. 3
   D. 4
   E. 5 or more

3. How many times have you taken the Professional Knowledge (PK) subtest altogether?

   A. 1
   B. 2
   C. 3
   D. 4
   E. 5 or more

(Continued on next page)

DIRECTIONS:

When NTE Core Battery test takers have to retake one of the sub-tests due to a low score they follow a variety of procedures to try to improve their scores between when they first failed and when they eventually passed.

4. Which one of the following statements best describes the procedure which you followed after taking the COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS (CS) sub-test the first time? Indicate only one statement.

   A. I passed it so I did not retake it.
   B. I simply retook it at least once without doing anything in between which I feel improved my score.
   C. I did retake it at least once, but there were some things which I did in between which I feel improved my score.

5. Which one of the following statements best describes the procedure which you followed after taking the GENERAL KNOWLEDGE (GK) subtest the first time? Indicate only one statement.

   A. I passed it so I did not retake it.
   B. I simply retook it at least once without doing anything in between which I feel improved my score.
   C. I did retake it at least once, but there were some things which I did in between which I feel improved my score.

6. Which one of the following statements best describes the procedure which you followed after taking the PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE (PK) subtest the first time? Indicate only one statement.

   A. I passed it so I did not retake it.
   B. I simply retook it at least once without doing anything in between which I feel improved my score.
   C. I did retake it at least once, but there were some things which I did in between which I feel improved my score.

(Continued on next page)

DIRECTIONS:

Listed below are a number of procedures or "things" which test takers might have done to improve their score between the time they first took (and failed) one or more of the parts, and when they eventually did pass it (regardless of the number of retakes). PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SIX STEPS:

STEP ONE--Read the entire list one or more times before going on.

STEP TWO--Circle the number in front of each activity which you did between initial failure and eventual passing of any of the NTE Core Battery subtests, which you feel helped to improve your score.

List A--Score Improving Activities

1. Took fewer tests at one time.
2. Got plenty of rest the night before.
3. Asked questions and/or discussed the test with other individuals who have taken the test.
4. Used one of the commercial study guides (such as can be bought in the bookstore).
5. Reviewed materials (notes, books, etc.) from courses taken in the past.
6. Obtained tutoring (one-on-one) for the test.
7. Attended a free workshop on preparing to take the NTE.
8. Attended a commercial (costs money to attend) workshop on preparing to take the NTE.
9. Took a regular college course.

STEP THREE--If there are some other things which you did which helped, but which are not listed above, please list them below. Use a separate line for each. If there are none go directly to step #4.

List B

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Continued on next page)

STEP FOUR--Look only at the items which you have already identified as having helped you to improve your score (the ones in List A whose numbers you circled and those you added to List B). Place an asterisk (*) in front of the five which you feel were most helpful. If there were less than five "most helpful" activities then use less than five asterisks.

STEP FIVE--Look only at the items which you just asterisked (*). If one of them stands out as the single most helpful activity place an additional asterisk in front of it so it has a double one (**).

STEP SIX--Place the completed questionnaire in the enclosed envelope and mail as soon as possible. No postage is necessary.

Once again, thank you for your assistance in helping others!

RETAKING THE NTE CORE BATTERY

WHAT HELPS?

Bruce K. Alcorn, Ph.D.
Director, Undergraduate
Teacher Certification
Ball State University

An increasing number of states are requiring prospective teachers to pass a battery of tests as part of the licensure process. Not passing just one of the tests poses a potential problem of major significance since all must be passed in order for the individual to practice the profession for which he or she has invested four or more years of resources. As a result, test retaking is a common practice with eventual success in a significant number of cases.

This study investigated whether or not those individuals who retook such tests did anything between initial test failure and eventual test passing which they felt helped them to pass?

A number of activities and/or procedures were identified as having been productive (helping to pass the test) with the single most important being the use of a commercial study guide.